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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

Social Diagnosis. By MARY E. RICHMOND. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1917. 8vo, pp. 511. \$2.00.

This is a textbook for social workers—to be precise, for “case workers.” “Case workers” are social workers whose function is to deal with individuals and families rather than communities.

The origin and purpose of this book are stated in the Preface:

Fifteen years ago I began to take notes, gather illustrations and even draft a few chapters for a book on Social Work in Families. In it I hoped to pass on to the younger people coming into the charity organization field an explanation of the methods that their seniors had found useful. It soon became apparent, however, that no methods or aims were peculiarly and solely adapted to the treatment of the families that found their way to a charity organization society; that, in essentials, the methods and aims of social case work were or should be the same in every type of service, whether the subject was a homeless paralytic, the neglected boy of drunken parents, or the widowed mother of small children. Some procedures, of course, were peculiar to one group of cases and some to another, according to the special social disability under treatment. But the things that most needed to be said about case work were the things that were common to all. The division of social work into departments and specialties was both a convenience and a necessity; fundamentals remained, however.

Social Diagnosis is, in short, the first notable attempt to formulate the practices and fund the experience gathered by social workers during a quarter-century of clinical practice and experiment. During this time welfare work, or social work, to use the language of the present volume, has become an occupation and a profession. There were in 1915, for example, 3,968 social workers employed in salaried positions in New York City by private agencies alone. Of these the author estimates that 2,200 were in social agencies doing case work. The others were engaged in whole or in part in “community movements, research and propaganda.” The present volume is based in a very definite way upon the experience of these 2,200 case workers and of others in agencies throughout the United States.

In 1911, when Mary Richmond became a member of the staff of the Russell Sage Foundation, she set out to gather and formulate the experi-

ence of workers in all fields in which social case work was used in the United States. At the outset she availed herself of notes and suggestions contained in fugitive or unpublished papers of other writers whose experience in certain lines of social work had led them to reflect upon its methods and technique. In addition to this a systematic study was made of the records of five different cities of the United States by two experienced case workers. The differences of method were carefully noted. The facts in regard to sources of information used in making diagnoses were reduced to statistical form for comparison.

The task of the author has been to reduce this mass of concrete materials to its elements; to classify, organize, and digest it; to construct, in short, out of an accumulation of observation, suggestion, and practice a working system of concepts and ideas. The task has been well done. With this book social welfare work has ceased to be a mere body of traditional practices and is in a way to become a science. We now have a fairly precise language in which to describe social-welfare facts and a technique for discovering, testing, and interpreting them. Social work thus becomes, not merely beneficent, but intelligible.

It is impossible by any mere catalogue of contents to give an adequate conception of the wealth of material contained in this volume. The first chapter reviews briefly the early attempts to base social welfare work on investigation rather than good will and common sense. The remaining four chapters of Part I are devoted to a discussion of what the author calls social as distinguished from legal or court evidence. The fundamental distinction here is not logical but practical. The difference between social facts and legal facts is the difference in point of view between the social worker and the lawyer.

Part II is a description of the present practices of social workers so far as concerns the investigation of individuals and the family. Separate chapters discuss "the first interview," sources of information, such as relatives, schools, employers, social agencies, medical, neighborhood, and documentary sources.

Part III consists of a series of questionnaires indicating the kind of information that is important to look for in the investigation of different types of cases, for example: the immigrant family, the deserted or widowed mother, the neglected child, the unmarried mother, the blind, the insane, the homeless man.

Although it was written primarily for a special class of social workers, *Social Diagnosis* will interest every student of the social sciences who believes that sociology is ever to be anything more than a philosophy of

history or an appanage of social psychology. What one sees in this book is social practice struggling to lift its problems to the plane of the general and conceptional point of view; allying itself thus with the great body of systematic knowledge we call science. Social practice is doing this, not for the sake of science, but in an effort to perpetuate and justify its own traditions and technique. It is just in this way that exact knowledge has grown up and superseded speculation in every field of science. *Social Diagnosis* is interesting merely as an illustration of this process.

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Government Telephones: The Experience of Manitoba, Canada.

By JAMES MAVOR. New York: Moffatt, Yard & Co., 1916.
8vo, pp. viii+176.

The establishment of the government ownership and operation of telephones in the province of Manitoba, according to Professor Mavor's searching historical analysis, has been a most unsavory affair. Certainly it involved features most discreditable to the political party responsible for it. This is, however, only part and not the worst of a long record of political fraud unequaled by that of any other government in Canada. The establishment was a move to bolster up the political fortunes of a party declining in the estimation of the people, and its operation was always dictated, not by sound business principles, but by the political exigencies of the times. The extension of the system into rural districts was a particularly useful expedient, especially just before elections. Professor Mavor doubts whether the system would have fared better in the hands of the Liberal party. Unfortunately it is now impossible for the Liberal party, which is at present in power, to undo much of the harm done. The payment of an excessive purchase price (which, according to Professor Mavor, the Liberals exaggerate), the failure to provide adequate funds for maintenance and depreciation, and the general cloud under which the operation of the system from first to last lies are handicaps which it will be hard to remove. Professor Mavor tells a startling story of wrongdoing that destroyed all that the telephone commissioners (competent men) undertook in the way of efficient management.

While written in an admirable style and well arranged, the book fails fully to convince the analytical reader. It is a well-known fact that Professor Mavor's conclusions on the question of public ownership and